

RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM The Today Show

STATION WRC-TV
NBC Network

DATE May 14, 1985 7:00 A.M.

CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT CIA Involvement in Middle East

BRYANT GUMBEL: There are some hard questions this morning concerning CIA involvement in counter-terrorism in the Middle East. On March 8th more than 80 people were killed when a car bomb exploded in a crowded section of downtown Beirut, a bombing the Washington Post now says was carried out by CIA-trained counter-terrorists.

Though the agency has denied the report, Senator Patrick Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, does not consider the case closed, and he is seeking some answers. He joins us this morning from our studios in Washington.

In an unusual move, the CIA has officially denied the allegations in those press reports. Are you convinced the agency shares no responsibility?

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: Well, I think that it's probably so that they did not order that car-bombing and did not take part in the car-bombing. It would have been an act of sheer stupidity had they done that

But I think that the much larger question, the one that we should be looking at as an ongoing thing is just what is the CIA able to do about terrorism. It's the biggest threat that the United States faces, outside of nuclear war, today. It's driving our foreign policy and our defense policy, and we seem almost helpless outside the United States to combat terrorism. We're behind the curve on it, and we've got to do a heck of a lot better than we're doing now.

GUMBEL: Do you believe U.S. dollars have been used to finance hit squads in the Middle East, as Representative

Schroeder charged on the House floor?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, you know, to go into that you have to go into highly classified material, which I'm not at liberty to do. I think that what we have had is, in the past, almost a flailing around, of trying to figure out how you handle terrorism issues, instead of doing it -- well, let's make a comparison. The FBI has certainly been able to do a very good job on terrorist matters. The arrest of these Sikhs who were planning to assassinate the Prime Minister when he came here is an example of it.

The CIA, the Defense Department, State Department have got to get an awful lot better so that they can preempt terrorists, so they can stop them before they strike. And we're not in a position to do that. I don't think we're going to be in a position to do that if we think we can rely on some other country, rely on whether it's called hit squads or anything else, because they're going to operate on their own agenda. And that agenda may well not be ours.

GUMBEL: Well, you have said we should use Americans to do America's work. But in the matter of preemptive counter-terrorist strikes, should we regard anything as acceptable behavior?

SENATOR LEAHY: No. I think we know what is acceptable. We -- you know, there's a big difference, for example, between assassinations and self-defense. And I think we know the difference. One is murder and one's self-defense.

Certainly if we could have stopped, if we could have struck at and stopped the terrorists who bombed and killed the 250 Marines in Beirut, that would be acceptable. Sending a car bomb down that indiscriminately kills a whole lot of people, with the off chance that you might get somebody who you think is someone you should be after, that's not acceptable at all.

GUMBEL: This isn't the first time your Intelligence Committee has been a bit surprised by some CIA charges. Are you satisfied with the flow of information that you're getting from CIA head Bill Casey?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, I think that it could be better. I think it's almost a constant battle. It's like pulling teeth. But that makes it all the more important that the oversight committee does a tough day-by-day job. I wish it was an easier thing. I think it would be better for the country. I think it'd be better for the CIA.

GUMBEL: Does he volunteer information, or need you pull it every time?

3

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, I feel that instead of a law degree I should have had a degree in dentistry. I really do. It's like pulling teeth.

GUMBEL: As you try to get some answers on this, what's your next step? Where do you go from here?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, I hope we don't just get into a thing where we spend the next several months going back and let's have a hearing here, let's have a hearing there, and see how go out first with the headlines. I think that it's far more important that we look where we are today, what we could do to stop terrorism, and how we beef up that. Because I think all of us agree we're not doing enough, we're not adequately prepared to combat terrorists.

GUMBEL: We've only 15 seconds left. Real quick, are you at all concerned that in the wake of all of these reports U.S. installations, personnel are now in greater jeopardy?

SENATOR LEAHY: I think they're in very grave jeopardy, anyway, the gravest that they've been, certainly, in the ten years that I've been here in Washington.

GUMBEL: Senator Patrick Leahy.

Again, thank you for joining us, sir. Good luck in dental school.

SENATOR LEAHY: Thank you.